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The translated deaf self, ontological (in)security and deaf culture

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we posit and explore the concept of 'the translated deaf self', tentatively defined as: 'the socio-cultural impact for deaf sign language users of multiple, regular, lifelong experiences of being encountered by others and inter-subjectively known in a translated form, i.e. through sign language interpreters'. Regarding translation as both linguistic and non-linguistic, we explore the translated deaf self in terms of ontological (in)security in the context of phonocentrism, demonstrating how the recursive dynamics of structure-agency, within and through which the self is constituted, are impacted by the contingency of being interpreted. We show how such impacts on self, identity and agency are not equivalent to the hearing non-signing actors who also participate in relational encounters through sign language interpreters. The extent to which the shared experience of the translated deaf self may or may not be considered constitutive of (deaf) culture is examined with reference to strategies of linguistic resistances and personal empowerment evident in our data but not universally available or necessarily considered desirable from a collective perspective. Finally, we reflect on how to breakdown the exclusive and excluding nature of considerations such as these by breaking free of the written/signed signifier.

KEYWORDS

Sign language interpreting; deaf culture; ontological security; phonocentrism; non-linguistic translation

Introduction

Struggles for the recognition of cultural identity associated with minority language use are common to many peoples worldwide, with origins lying in complex socio-political histories usually associated with person and place. In this sense, the struggle by deaf sign language users in many countries around the world is no different: it is fundamentally about the recognition of signed languages as fully grammatical, indigenous languages of their countries of origin and the associated cultural status of their communities of users (Jepsen et al. 2015; Wheatley and Pabsch 2012). Yet the deaf experience of cultural-linguistic recognition *is* different because of the discourses and experiences of disability, impairment and (hearing) loss that also surround deaf people (Lane 1999). There is a tension between societal perceptions of deaf people as being disabled, and their status as 'sign language peoples' (Jokinen 2001; De Meulder 2014; Napier and Leeson 2016), as

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often legislative instruments frame sign language rights within the context of disability rights (De Meulder and Murray 2017; World Federation of the Deaf 2018). For example, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (2007) mentions the rights of deaf people to access their education in sign language (Murray, De Meulder, and le Maire 2018). Thus, deaf signers' linguistic status is often regarded as a disability access issue, rather than a feature of multilingual society. The World Federation of the Deaf (2018, 10–11) argues that an intersectional stance should be taken with regards to deaf signers as part of a language minority *and* a disability minority:

> deaf people differ from other linguistic minorities in one important way – while many users of minority languages are able to learn and function in majority languages, deaf people are usually unable to fully access the spoken languages of their surrounding environment because of their auditory-oral transmission. Therefore, sign languages are not only culturally important, they can be the sole means of language development and accessible communication for deaf people.

In countries with advanced equality rights legislation, the provision of sign language interpreters is usually framed as a disability rights adjustment to promote equality (e.g. Equality Act 2010) rather than a citizenship provision based on language rights (Haualand 2009; Napier 2011). The UN Convention on the Rights of Disabled People (CRPD) specifically mentions the right for deaf people to access professional sign language interpreting services in all areas of life (Stone 2013). Thus, sign language interpreters inadvertently become perpetuating signifiers of disability under disability rights legislation. They are rarely understood as contingent practices for all people, whether hearing or deaf, enabling society's benefit from the full participation and contribution of deaf peoples.

The problematic positioning of the sign language interpreter at the nexus of social discourses that both support and deny the cultural-linguistic identity of deaf peoples is an under-theorised concern within translation studies, interpreting studies and deaf cultural studies. The 'sociological turn' in translation studies (Snell-Hornby 2006; Angelelli 2012) has given greater consideration to the role of translation in forming cultural identities (Venuti 1994), and the fact that the act of translation can promote national identity (Gentzler 2008). However, work has primarily focused on the identity of translators themselves (Cronin 2006). Gentzler recognises that translation is constitutive of culture, and notes the potential for translation to be a permanent condition, but little attention has been given to how individuals form their own identity, including intersectional identity(ies), as a consequence of 'being translated'.

Although we know that deaf people can communicate directly with hearing non-signers by drawing on a wide-ranging communicative repertoire, such as signing, writing, pointing, gesturing (Kusters 2017a, 2017b), sign language interpreters are the fundamental mediators of the contact zones in which deaf and hearing people (who do not sign) meet in various contexts, and especially in professional work contexts (Hauser, Finch, and Hauser 2008; Dickinson 2014; Miner 2017).

As noted by Cronin and Simon (2014, 121), contact zones are social spaces 'where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other … and translation is logically one of the major activities in the contact zone'. Therefore, it is surprising that minimal consideration has been given to the role of sign language interpreters as the 'human technology' through which the inter-subjective experience of the other is enabled, not

just the mechanism through which mutual communication is exchanged. When a sign language interpreter is present, through them, deaf people are known/become known in their translated form, from the perspective of the majority population.

Furthermore, for deaf people, the experience of being known in translation[1] is not a temporary one as it might be for those transitioning from one language use to another, as might be the case for hearing migrant populations, for example (Napier 2015a). This is a complex situation. Deaf people will always be deaf, regardless of whether they use any technical aids. The initial acquisition or later second language learning of spoken language-(s) is not straightforward (Marschark 2017; Meier 2016) and learning and using a signed language are also not easy in the absence of a signed language as their home language (Humphries et al. 2012). Nevertheless, once deaf people acquire and use a signed language, they will typically continue to use it on an everyday basis as their preferred form of communication (De Meulder 2018). However, deaf signers engage in bilingual (and sometimes multilingual) practices, as they need to at least acquire the written language of their country in order to complete their education and access information in wider society (De Meulder 2016). Although digital forms of information exchange are increasingly accessible through video and therefore potentially through signed languages, written literacy, be it in its digital form, remains the substantial repository of knowledge transfer in wider society. This represents a potentially substantial barrier to knowledge acquisition for many deaf people given common and persistent low levels of written literacy amongst many deaf signers throughout the world (Glaser and van Pletzen 2012; Meyer 2007).

Consequently, there will always be some fundamental aspects of everyday life negotiated through sign language interpreters for some deaf signers, such as in employment or engagement with health-care professionals (Napier and Leeson 2016), as well as education and other forms of knowledge acquisition (Marschark, Peterson, and Winston 2005). In this sense, deaf people's experiences of working with sign language interpreters are of ontological and epistemological import; it is a perpetuating aspect of lived experience over which there may be little choice and it is one means through which deaf people become known and their knowledge experienced by others.

These two strands of thought, the significance of sign language interpreting practice in the context of contested cultural identity recognition and the common deaf experience of being known in translation by the cultural-linguistic majority other, led us in 2015 to a research project that sought to explore what we termed the '*translated deaf self*'. In coining this phrase we were emphasising first, that not all translation practices are necessarily solely inter- or intra-linguistic (Gal 2015); that is, who we *are* is also open to translation by and to the other. Clearly, this ontological emphasis is not entirely disconnected from language and communication. In Bakhtin's terms, the self is linguistically constituted and reconstituted through people's dialogic relationships with and about each other (Bakhtin 1981). Our point is that an examination of the linguistic elements of intersubjective interpreting practices is not in and of itself the only extent of an exploration of the translated deaf self.

Second, in coining the phrase the translated deaf self we wanted to make a clear distinction between the 'self' and 'identity' for purposes of exploration, not necessarily because they are totally unrelated. Beginning from Giddens (1991, 53) argument that the self is 'what a person is understood to be' given that subjectivity is socially constituted, we were interested in the ways in which translation practice (in this case sign language interpreting) was a socially constitutive medium through which deaf people's

subjectivities are produced and maintained. However, our gaze was not confined to the intersubjective relations of specific interpreted encounters. Our concern with the translated deaf self also extended to the socio-structural mechanisms, and in particular social discourses, that are reflected through and/or challenged and resisted in the numerous and perpetuating encounters that are mediated through sign language interpreting. In Foucauldian (1980) terms, those who hold power to produce (and maintain) dominant discourse(s) also have the power to manufacture what is 'true'. This is a central pillar of deaf peoples' challenge to an omnipresent social discourse that seeks to categorise and place boundaries around who they are in terms of deficit and disability rather than recognise deaf peoples' diverse cultural-linguistic identities (Bat-Chava 2000; Ladd 2003; Leigh 2009), including intersectional identities arising through ethnicity, faith, sexuality and citizen/nationhood (Bauman 2008a).

Our third emphasis in coining the phrase the translated deaf self was to stress that acts of translation are productive not just replicative (Gal 2105); the sign language interpreter in real time, place and context is more than the arbiter of linguistic content: s/he is imbued with powers of representation and portrayal of *the person*. Clearly, this is true both ways round – of the hearing person to the deaf person and vice versa. However, not all languages are perceived to be equal in terms of status, significance (power), relevance or capacity (May 2006). The denial of the linguistic status of signed languages is a modern fact within living memory (Batterbury, Ladd, and Gulliver 2007) although not necessarily an historical truth (see, for example, Davis 1995; Lane 1984). Consequently, the (re) productive translation of the deaf self through sign language interpreting occurs within a context in which the very language modalities are imbued with socially unequal meanings and status. If marginalisation is considered a phenomenon produced through how societies structurally and discursively position people (Kinnvall 2004, 745), then deaf people being more readily perceived as disabled, and signed languages not universally recognised, positions the act of sign language interpreting institutionally as 'for' the deaf person (De Meulder and Haualand 2019; Hall 2018; Mole 2018), and deaf people as 'users' of sign language interpreters. In such circumstances, the translated deaf self is not necessarily as equal as the translated hearing self (Young, Oram and Napier 2019).

For the purposes of the research study, our working definition of the 'translated deaf self' was: 'the socio-cultural impact for deaf sign language users of multiple, regular, lifelong experiences of being encountered by others and inter-subjectively known in a translated form i.e. through sign language interpreters'. Our work as a whole sought to examine whether the phenomenon we had tentatively proposed might be recognisable to deaf people, what its parameters and underlying process might consist of, and ultimately whether the ways in which the lived experience of the translated deaf self might be considered constitutive of (deaf) culture. It is to the last of those aims that this article refers. Specifically, we address ontological (in) security pertaining to the translated deaf self, drawing on data from our original study and in the context of both deaf cultural studies and translation and interpreting studies. We begin, however, with a brief description of the research methods in the study.

Methods

The overall scoping study collected data from four groups of participants: (i) a community participatory study (n = 7) utilising deaf-led focus groups in BSL followed by individual interviews of selected deaf professionals (n = 3); (ii) an individual interview study (n = 8) of hearing colleagues' experience of working alongside deaf colleagues in interpreted and non-interpreted circumstances (not reported on in this article, see Young, Oram, and Napier 2019); (iii) a focus group study of sign language interpreters (n = 7) (not reported on in this article, see Napier, Skinner, Young, and Oram 2019a; and (iv) a stimulated recall study involving the filming of five live interpreted situations in work contexts followed by individual interviews with the deaf participant (n = 5) (not reported in this article). A phenomenological approach within the interpretative/hermeneutic tradition (Moustakas 1994) underpinned the qualitative analysis of interview and focus group data which were analysed in their source language (whether BSL and/or English).

Ontological (in)security, the translated self and deaf culture

The most recent waves of deaf cultural studies are moving away from ethnographic and social-constructionist approaches concerned with the definition and differentiation of deaf culture (e.g. Erting et al. 1994; Padden 1980; Senghas and Monaghan 2002; van Cleve and Crouch 1989) to a concern with deaf being and becoming. The so-called ontological turn has various streams. The exploratory and emancipatory approach of Ladd and his followers under the concept of 'Deafhood' (Hauser et al. 2010; Ladd 2003; Ladd and Lane 2013) emphasises the processes of decolonising the deaf mind and exploring the deaf experience of the world in order to reclaim and inhabit one's deaf identity, with identity firmly associated with agency, of both the individual and the collective. Deaf culture(s) are identified as collective cultures in which shared values, traditions and community priorities as well as common experiences arising from both proximal and distal responses to being deaf are recognised as constitutive of cultural identity beyond the individual (Friedner 2016; Young, Ferguson-Coleman, and Keady 2018). 'Deaf gain' foregrounds the cognitive, social and cultural advantages of being a visual language user within a transnational community, ultimately concluding that sign language peoples should be universally recognised as a visual variety of the human race whose presence expands our very notions of being (Bahan 2008; Bauman and Murray 2010, 2014). For De Clerck (2017), to be deaf requires participation and growth with other deaf people in community through which deaf culture is a process of shared constitutive learning to which all deaf people might contribute and through which it is possible to experience and achieve 'deaf flourishing'. However, as Kusters and De Meulder (2013) point out, foregrounding the ontological aspects of contemporary deaf cultural studies also requires fundamental attention to the everyday and the practical realities of living as a deaf person alongside recognition of the vast heterogeneity of deaf people's individual choices and intersecting identities. They stop short, however, of including within that analysis the relational impacts of sign language interpreters in the everyday lives of deaf people alongside other 'technologies' such as amplification and cochlear implants and the use, by some culturally deaf people, of spoken language too.

In our work on the translated deaf self, the ontological aspects of exploration of deaf culture were focused on the potential for ontological (in)security arising from social relations with and through sign language interpreting as a *recurring element* of deaf lives although not necessarily the dominant one; for many deaf signers the majority of interactions in everyday life with partners, friends and in non-formal contexts will not include sign language interpreters. By ontological security we do not intend an essentialist meaning that posits a core sense of self whether in terms of the continuity of the biographical self or the inner psychological correlates of health. Rather, from a more social-constructionist perspective, the self is a situated self, constituted and reconstituted by intersubjective relations, discourse, narrative, time and context. Consequently, ontological security is evident in the potential for the adaptability of the self not just in its stability. In this sense, ontological security is not synonymous with self-identity; it is more akin to the processes that enable the perpetuation, expression and performance of that identity in the face of misunderstanding, alternative discourses and threat. As Browning and Joenniemi (2016, 42) remark: ' … ontological security is intimately connected to intersubjectivity and recognition dynamics. The point is that selves are not simply ascribed with subjectivity, it (subjectivity) rather needs to be continually claimed, fought for, performed and articulated'.

From this perspective, being known in translation is a potential threat to ontological security because of the inherent disruptive potential of the expression of self and knowledge of the other, inherent in indirect and mediated interpreted conversation. Although this might be true of any interpreted social transaction, sign language interpreting is a different order of transaction than that of spoken language interpreting because it is an inherently multimodal process (Berge 2018; Napier 2015b; Major and Napier 2019). Furthermore, modality translation queries fundamental assumptions that to be is to speak: 'to be able to "hear oneself speak" is a moment of ontological significance, the lack of which is deeply challenging to fundamental ideas about language and identity' (Anglin-Jaffe 2011, 31).

As Derrida (1976 [1979]) argues, it is through, quite literally, hearing oneself speak, that hearing speaking people *are*, recognise, and simultaneously convey, their own presence in the world.

> The system of "hearing (understanding) -oneself-speak" through the phonic substance – which presents itself as the nonexterior, nonmundane, therefore nonempirical or noncontingent signifier – has necessarily dominated the history of the world … (Derrida 1976 [1979], 78).

He identifies this as a fundamentally constitutive process of power, identifying unthinking ontological orientation to the dominance of the phonic in language as 'the most original and powerful ethnocentrism' (1976 [1979], 70). Although Derrida never considered deaf peoples and signed languages, the discriminatory implications of phonocentrism have been taken up by deaf studies scholars whether in terms of the social model of disability (Corker 1997) or with reference to 'audism' – a critical analysis of how society in its structures and its communicative practices (re)produces inequalities and discriminations that have at their root an unthinking praxis of normalcy deriving from the dominance of the spoken word (Baumann 2008b; Humphries 1977; Lane 1999). As Spivak (2000) wryly remarks, 'No speech is speech if it is not heard'.

However, such deaf studies critical theory has not paid attention to sign language interpretation in terms of the implications of Derrida's critique of phonocentrism. Interpretation by its very nature disrupts the simultaneity of speech-language-the person that Derrida (1976) identifies as the site of presence. This is because it introduces a third element, an additional person, losing the simultaneity of expression, presence and being, and introducing an alternative epistemic pathway. Sign language interpretation renders the situation even more complex because not only is the relationship between language and the person disrupted but a concept of language as synonymous with speech is disrupted too. Through speaking for ourselves, or indeed signing for ourselves, individuals are made present (present-ed through that process). Speaking or signing through another individual is, by contrast, (re)presented (as different, abstracted and at one remove). It is what Irving (2017) in a different context refers to as an ontogenetic process whereby moments of liminality and schism about who I am are introduced through factors that render being as something contingent and therefore uncertain – in this case the contingency is sign language interpretation. The experience of participants in our study in respect of ontological (in)security and sign language interpretation was very different depending on the group consulted, but each contributed new insights into this question.

Ontological (in)security, linguistic access and participation

To engage with discussions about being known in translation requires a displaced gaze; one in which a person simultaneously holds a sense of themselves *and* a sense of themselves as seen/perceived by the other. In an embodied visual language such conceptual layers are relatively straightforwardly expressed. The expressive subject can draw out themselves from inside their body, hold it up in front them for examination, look at it and then look outward indicating how others are looking at their 'self' in one deft movement of gesture, handshape, placement and eye gaze. As Adams (2009, 214) remarks: 'many worlds are defined and created by the capacities inherent in language' (cited in Fekete 2017, 132) and the inherent expressive, generative capabilities of how signed, visual languages grammatically operate are well suited to the expression of such complex ideas (see also Young et al. 2016). However, for one of our groups, understanding the idea was not the problem; seeing it had any relevance was. This was the Community Participation Group (CPG), drawn largely from deaf people with low socio-economic status, poor educational attainment and who experienced multiple social exclusions both in terms of being deaf and in terms of being from a minority population in general in the UK.

For this group, potential impacts of others' indirect knowledge of them in terms of personal agency were of far less importance than much more pressing and immediate concerns. These revolved around the most basic of considerations, such as whether a sign language interpreter would be provided in the first place for appointments with health professionals, for example,

> On the records it states that an interpreter has been booked, but nobody came and I was still left without an explanation. I was stressed when I came home. I didn't complain because I don't want any trouble. It is hard for me.

Whether the sign language interpreter was one they knew and liked, felt was qualified appropriately and could be trusted were also recurring considerations. Likes and dislikes about individual interpreter styles and behaviours were also extensively discussed.

In analysing the CPG data, it was clear that uncertainty surrounding the mechanism (sign language interpreter) to participate in discussions and decisions that affected their lives was of far greater significance than uncertainty surrounding whether the hearing other fully engaged with them as individuals, whether they could fully express who they were and how they might be portrayed. Ontological (in)security was fundamentally evident in terms of uncertainty of linguistic access and therefore uncertainty of participation. This is an experience evident in a great deal of contemporary research particularly with respect to the interface of deaf people's lives with formal state services such as health, education and social care (Napier and Kidd 2013; Napier et al. 2014; NHS England, 2018; Rogers, Ferguson-Coleman, and Young 2018). In circumstances where a basic right to sign language interpreter access could not consistently be guaranteed, which was the CPG's lived experience, the ontological positioning of being known in translation and its potential effects were of little import and frankly of little use in the eyes of the CPG in the face of more fundamental struggles for rights of citizenship assured by rights of language.

Nonetheless, in Foucauldian terms, the socio-structural inequalities of policy and practice that do not ensure certainty of access and participation have ontological significance as they are an example of one of 'the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subject' (Foucault 1982, 777). The deaf person's subjectivity is created and maintained by mechanisms of uncertain linguistic access and social participation, thus shaping the potential of the deaf self to be and act in the world. In this way boundaries surrounding intersubjective deaf/hearing experiences are created and how deaf people are perceived becomes limited by the extent of participatory experience with the hearing, non-signing other. What it is possible for a hearing person to know through their experience of deaf people also becomes defined and de-limited. Although in one sense such a conclusion may be true of any two peoples without smooth communicative access with the other, it is different between deaf and hearing people. The weight of difference lies in the potential for ineffective or exclusionary mutual communication to reinforce the socially dominant understandings of deaf people as disabled from whom low expectations of understanding and participation might be regarded as normal and seemingly explicable by their deafness.

Yet amongst the CPG members, there was no reflexive critical consciousness in their discussions that would identify in lay terms the *structural-level* discrimination evident in sign language interpretation being withheld or uncertain. Indeed, much of modern deaf cultural theory, whether from a post-colonial perspective or not, has an emancipatory intent to raise deaf people's critical consciousness whether through making visible the social mechanisms of what Ladd (2003) would regard as hegemonic subjugation practices, or through changing the social conditions in which it is possible for deaf people to realise and take their own alternative 'flourishing' (De Clerck 2017). As Browning and Joenniemi (2016, 40) remark, drawing on Giddens (1991), reflexive awareness is inseparable from self-identity (in this case deaf identity) because it is the reflexive activities of individuals that create and sustain self-identity. From this perspective, self-identity is not a given, nor is it static; it responds to and is nourished by socially and linguistically situated

processes. One such process is the routine engagement with sign language interpretation as a part of everyday life, whether on a regular or intermittent basis.

Although these data might highlight access to translation as the first step to having a 'voice' that may be seen, and therefore the potential for the exercise of personal agency in the construction and communication of the self, they also demonstrate that agency cannot be understood without recourse to structure and vice versa within a framework of duality rather than dualism (Giddens 1984). As long as structure controls access to interpreters, and uncertainty remains over the very presence and/or adequacy of interpreting arrangements, personal agency is shaped and constrained by that structural reality. From this perspective, access to sign language interpreters is not a marker of empowerment; it is a conditional uncertainty that simply should not exist if personal agency was not constrained by structural realities that render the subject dependent rather than free.

Ontological (in)security and the practice of agency in the translation of the deaf self

By contrast, the small group of highly educated, highly experienced deaf professionals who participated in the study explored a totally different set of considerations about the translated deaf self, ontological (in)security, and the practice of working with sign language interpreters. They were all members of what has been termed the deaf professional class (De Meulder 2017), sometimes referred to as the deaf middle class (Padden and Humphries 2005), the emergence of which is a relatively recent phenomenon, mainly in the Global North. A key feature of such deaf professionals is that they regularly work with sign language interpreters in the workplace to facilitate interactions with their hearing counterparts which has given rise to new investigations of sign language interpreting practices in such contexts from deaf professionals' perspectives, rather than necessarily from the interpreter's perspective (Hauser, Finch, and Hauser 2008; Dickinson 2014; Miner 2017; Holcomb and Smith 2018). The engagement of our participants with the concept of the translated deaf self was enthusiastic and intense, generating personal reflexive accounts of issues they had seldom, if ever, considered.

All participants were acutely aware, from a professional perspective, that the interpreter was not just translating the content of their communication but was also portraying them in a process of co-construction of their deaf-and professional-identities (Napier, Young, Oram and Skinner 2019b). The sign language interpreter was recognised as an inseparable part of their role performance because it was through her/him that hearing non-signing others picked up vital perceptual clues as to who they were, their attitudes and opinions and their contribution and stance on any given issue. For example, tone of voice, lexical choices, register and even the appearance of the interpreter were embodied inter-linguistic *and* non-linguistic translations of identity. Furthermore, given the embodied nature of signed languages, translation in this sense also encompassed performance; identity performed through another's body, not just identity conveyed through another language, with that other body physically present alongside the originator of the communication (the deaf person) rather than at one remove. Participants were very thoughtful about the potentially positive implications of this embodied linguistic portrayal of

themselves as well as its challenges with some describing strategic choices they make in the choice of the interpreter:

> Matching character is important. Not matching gender… how many interpreters are women?! Both my regular interpreters are female. I think it can give balance. But I don't really have a choice about choosing interpreters because of gender. But character is important. For example with the two interpreters I work with regularly, they have different characters, and their characters suit me in different situations [I pick which interpreter to book according to the situation]

> I've been given a senior role and responsibilities. I manage meetings. Do colleagues see me as someone in a leadership role or no different to their own positions? Is the interpreter getting my higher status across? Are people understanding that I am in the leadership position?

However, this issue of simultaneous presence of the self and the embodied portrayal of the self could also quite regularly cause confusion for the hearing others. Fundamentally orientated to sound and the spoken work, the hearing colleague would more readily look at the source of the spoken word (the interpreter) than look at the source of the communication (the deaf person) thus bypassing the originating embodied interlocutor of the inter-subjective professional encounter. For example,

> At a [name] event, I had an interpreter to provide the interpretation into English …. It was my presentation and the interpreter gets all the praise and told "what a wonderful job they did". How did they know [that she did a wonderful job]? … I've been invited to be the speaker, therefore I expect people to recognise that I'm there. See me not see the interpreter.

In this and other remarks in a similar vein, participants were not just acknowledging that in any interpreted communicative transaction there might be an element of 'double voicing' (Bakhtin 1981, 324) understood as the immanence of two voices in any dialogic utterance whereby the moral weight, social attitudes and personality of the interpreter might bleed into the interpreted rendering (Gal 2015). Participants were additionally drawing attention to the potential for the eradication of themselves as present active agents which in part derives from others' recognition of oneself as such an agent; an ontologically secure process which Kinnvall (2004, 746) describes in terms of the consistency of belief that the discourse about oneself is essentially a good one and rests on solid ground. The fundamental break in the simultaneity of the embodied expressive self, and the embodied performative self, inherent in one's portrayal through an interpreter, disrupts usual processes of others' appraisal of the individual and their role performance. This is not just because direct intersubjective communication as a fundamental process of meaning-making and appraisal is disrupted, but because additionally the embodied self and the communicative self are no longer co-terminus. Consequently, the resources available for the hearing non-signing individual to connect meaning and the person, identity and communication, are highly degraded. Often it is the skill of the sign language interpreter who is able to go some way to reversing this disconnect. For example, by using prosody, intonation and volume to reflect aspects of the deaf person's personality when interpreting from (in our case) BSL into spoken English; or using gesture to refer to the deaf person so that the hearing person directs their eye gaze towards them rather than the interpreter.

As one participant reflected on her experience of having been interviewed as part of the project:

> As you can imagine it gave me a great deal to think about. In fact I am still thinking about it. Partly because it was the first time anyone has asked how I feel about using a voice over. But also it reminded me that when, as a deaf person, passing my signs/words to another person to speak on my behalf, it feels like I am giving something away. How well do hearing people understand that the voice over is actually speaking what I need to say and that it is my skill, knowledge and expertise they are hearing.

Deaf professionals, however, also have agency in making a connection to their hearing counterparts if they feel that their embodied self is not revealed through the interpretation. For example, asking other hearing bilingual colleagues to comment on whether the interpreter reflects them, and/or is accurate in working in either language direction (see Haug et al. 2017). Our deaf professional participants reported that they also often lipread interpreters to check that their communicative self is represented through the interpreter's accurate choice of words, and they then make decisions about how to manage the situation (see Napier et al. 2019b). Furthermore, not all communication between deaf and hearing people necessarily involves a sign language interpreter all of the time. Some deaf people whose first or preferred language is a signed language also have the capacity to use spoken language although some who dos actively prefer not to. Amongst our participants, there were several who discussed when and why they chose to use their voice in a professional situation *where there was also a sign language interpreter present*. We refer to these as 'deaf contextual speakers' to highlight the significance of the situated nature of intersubjective relations in the construction and re-construction of the self in differing contexts (Giddens 1991). Their discussions revealed that a primary motivation for using their voice was to combat the diminishment of their agentic self. 'Both the shaping of agency and the agency to shape occur in the realm of conversations and interactions between people' (Van Langenhove 2017, 9). In the first example, the primacy of, and orientation to, the spoken word renders the ability to maintain power in role, in this case, chairing a meeting, more fragile.

> When I speak people look at me. When the interpreter speaks [because I am signing] they look at them … I feel like saying 'hello! I'm still here!'. I'm trying to chair a meeting but I don't have people looking [at me].

The fundamental deaf cultural orientation to maintaining eye contact and knowing that you are being attended to by others looking at you, as is the norm in visual languages, is also broken. Multiple transgressions of attention, respect and authority are embodied and conveyed in hearing people's orientation to the source of spoken communication which, as not emanating from the chair of the meeting, diminishes her power. In the second example, a means to overcome these effects is deployed through the choice of the deaf person to use spoken language. She is quite clear that key to this effect is not the use of the same language as the others in the meeting, but rather the use of the same modality (voice) within their own sensory orientation to sound:

> Like, if someone interrupts and says "I'm not happy with that!" I might respond (in BSL) 'I disagree' but the message doesn't get through to them in the spoken interpretation. I can then repeat myself 'I disagree' using my own voice and then it has a stronger impact. I use my

> voice politically and strategically to focus attention on the key issues. Sometimes through the interpreter and sometimes not.

Effectively, these deaf contextual speakers are employing translanguaging strategies (Wei 2018), that is, they draw upon their communicative repertoire in order to ensure that they achieve the communication and recognition of not only their deaf, but also their professional identity (Napier et al. 2019b). In so doing, they are participating in a social-construction of self that bypasses the translated deaf self in terms of being known through sign language interpreters yet at one and the same time is still a translated self in that it is an act of self-translation, to choose to speak so others might understand and see. In this sense, the language or modality is of less importance than the power to choose to find a way for others to access and appreciate the contribution that is being made in the professional role and to retain power in so doing.[2]

However, translanguaging choices such as these may also be controversial in the context of language ideologies such as DEAF-SAME (Kusters and Friedner 2015). Choosing to speak might be perceived as a form of betrayal of one of the central ideological elements of Deafhood and collectivist deaf community culture: which encompasses shared experience and people 'not sticking out' (De Meulder 2017). Nonetheless, in our data, the priorities of personal agency rather than collective agency predominated with one important caveat, that participants were mainly describing in the moment choices as responses to context, rather than universal strategies always used as a deaf professional in predominantly hearing, non-signing environments. They evaluate how they are being seen (or known) through translation and make decisions as to whether to continue to engage through translation, or directly with others. A key mediator in such choices is the extent of trust that individual deaf professionals have of interpreters:

> I should feel like I can concentrate on my work and the interpreter is invisible. It's become a habit where I'm monitoring the interpreter … At work I don't trust the interpreter. It's very rare I can relax and not worry about the interpreting. Very rare.

Features of 'trust' evident in our data included trust of interpreters' skills and abilities, of interpreters' ethical and professional boundaries, and the need for trust to build working relationships. These elements of trust were also raised by interpreters in our study (see Napier et al. 2019a)

However, what has been characterised thus far as of the moment choices, dependent on the configuration of interpreter trust and communicative context, was not the full story. Participants also drew attention to anticipatory concerns about the scope for the exercise and recognition of the agentic self that arose through lack of knowledge about and control over who would *be* them in any interpreted situation. The identity of the sign language interpreter and therefore the conditions surrounding how they would be portrayed (translated) and consequently known to others were often something over which they had no choice or control. If the identity of the interpreter was unknown because booked by another or without prior consultation, our participants suggested that they were less likely to feel confident in the professional situation before they even got to it:

> … when I go on a training course, I do feel anxious because they need to recruit external interpreters.

> It is a problem when I don't know the interpreter well. I go to a meeting where an interpreter has already been provided. If there hasn't been enough time before the meeting it can make it very difficult. I do feel stuck. If I know the interpreter, then I'm fine. If it's someone new I'd prefer a bit of time to get to know the interpreter and explain my role to them. I need to have that preparation time before the meeting, it's difficult.

A similar anticipatory anxiety arising from lack of knowledge of who the interpreter might be was noted by the five deaf professionals who reflected on their experience through the stimulated recall interviews, not just the deaf contextual speakers. This would suggest that the sense of insecurity experienced was not just a reflected effect of those who were able to use their translanguaging strategies to offset their concerns about representation. It was something much more fundamental about deaf people working with interpreters when choice of who will 'be' you cannot be controlled or open to personal preference.

However, all the deaf professionals that we interviewed noted that one way to alleviate any feelings of insecurity is by working regularly with the same interpreters to develop a level of familiarity and to ensure that there is a continuity and satisfaction in how they are represented. This speaks to an actively constructed ontological security both in the capacity to reinforce continuity in one's sense of self through the trusted predictability of how one is interpreted and in the sense of building an outwardly stable perceived identity in the eyes of others.

> It's about you scratch my back and I'll scratch your back … sometimes [interpreter] will say things I haven't exactly said, use nicer English words, and I think 'very good!'. Sometimes I'll monitor what she says when I'm signing by lipreading her, but not because I don't trust her, because I am interested to know what words she uses to represent me.

Conclusions

In this paper, we set out to explore the implications of what we have termed 'the translated deaf self' in terms of ontological (in)security in the contexts of both deaf cultural identity and sign language interpreting practice. In so doing, we have positioned translation as a fundamental axis in the socially constitutive self, not just in terms of inter-linguistic communication but in terms of non-linguistic intersubjective relations whether understood in terms of representation of self, agency – structure interaction, or social discourse. We have argued that for deaf sign language users, occupying an intersectional space of culture, disability and language in how being deaf is understood and perceived (alongside other aspects of individual intersectional identity(ies)), the lived experience of being known in translation addresses an identity recognition that far exceeds that of language recognition alone. We have shown how the translation of modality (voiced/seen) not just language (spoken/signed) creates ontological interstices through which two kinds of embodied self are not imbued with equivalent agentic power. And we have demonstrated how it is impossible to understand the translated deaf self without understanding how structure interacts with agency through the mechanisms of sign language interpreting provision and practice. In this final section, we briefly reflect on some implications that our work thus far provokes for deaf people's cultural-linguistic recognition and equality of participation and contribution to society.

This research has extended thinking about the relationship between communication and participation by deaf people (whether with or without interpreters) by foregrounding the significance of representation as an elemental component of the lived experience. Our data demonstrate that being translated is an ontological position too, one existing in the present continuous tense of 'being' as well as in the sense of an aspect of perceived identity by the other. Furthermore, the interpreter is not a means to intersubjective communicative access and social participation alone; the interpreter actively participates in the construction of the self that becomes known to the non-signing others. Thus, the interpreter is an active agent in the construction of meaning in a sense that is not just linguistic (translated) but in the sense of constituting how the deaf person is quite literally heard in context (translational and representational).

However, representation is itself a social construction which is inherently intertwined with language and communication as well as with power. As Van Langenhove remarks (2017, 6), we should 'regard structure and agency as analytical categories of which the manifestations are relational', in this through translation. Attributions deriving from the dominance of the phonocentric, the classification of deafness as disability and hierarchies of language bound up with hierarchies of communicative modality mean that to focus solely on the representative quality of the interpretation misses the significance of the 'malignant positioning' (Sabat 2003) to which deaf signers may be subject. The translated deaf self is also a product of others' responses to and attributions associated with the meanings of a non-heard, non-spoken language uttered by others whose cultural-linguistic identity is obscured by dominant perceptions of impairment. The sign language interpreter is both sign and signifier of these intersubjective and social processes through which the deaf self is conveyed because s/he enables the territory in which the deaf person is able to act and be acted upon with the non-signing hearing majority. The fragility of such processes may become resisted by the agentic choice to use a vocal medium by some deaf people to offset the limitations of representation through another. However, such actions of apparent resistance on an individual level may also be seen to be actions of failure to resist (dominant social relations) at a collective level.

Deaf cultural studies intensively challenge dominant social discourses about deaf people (De Clerck and Paul 2016; Kusters 2017a, 2017b) and theorise deaf identity and culture in new ways (Ladd 2003; Baumann and Murray 2014; De Clerck 2017). However, the translated deaf self in everyday life through interactions through interpreters (or active choices not to) has thus far not been seen as relevant to this process of changing the social relations of deaf people in the world today. It has not been adequately considered or theorised in the deaf studies or sign language interpreting literature despite a vast corpus of sociological work reminding us that unless representations are interrogated – in both their origins and their maintenance (Foucault 1982; Kelly 2013) – then empowerment and enfranchisement are harder to achieve. Our study has demonstrated the fundamental relevance of translation to such intent.

The question remains however of how considerations of the translated deaf self might be made relevant and open to a very wide diversity of exploration both in terms of increasing the critical consciousness of all those involved (deaf people, sign language interpreters, hearing others) and in terms of making such considerations accessible to the heterogeneity of deaf people. As our work has shown, it is not enough only to engage the professional, fluently bilingual, academic and an elite class of deaf citizens when the vast majority of deaf people do not benefit from such privileged positionalities.

One approach our work has taken, at the end of the first research study, was to seek to use an alternative, visual medium as the landscape for engagement and exploration, namely visual art. We commissioned four deaf artists to work with the idea of the translated deaf self in interactions with community members in different locations in the UK and to produce visual artworks that explore and convey the complexities of representation, agency, ontological (in)security, power, language and modality associated with being known to others through sign language interpreters. The resultant work toured the UK in a series of exhibitions and the artwork was curated in a digital format with commentaries by each artist: https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/artviatds/. Identified by the artists as a fascinating and challenging new conceptual territory they intend to further pursue the topic in later work and visitors both deaf and hearing people to the exhibitions have expressed fascination, challenge and intrigue with the implications of being known in translation so vividly conveyed in a medium that coheres with the sensory orientation of deaf peoples.

Our work makes a critical contribution to translation studies, interpreting studies and deaf cultural studies by extending our understanding of the relationship between language, culture, translation and identity, and the impact of the consistent experience of being translated on ontological (in)securities. We suggest that, for deaf sign language users in particular, the experience of being translated is a salient feature of deaf cultural life, and propose that this state of being could be further explored in relation to translating cultures in other language minorities.

Notes

1. We use the term translation in the broadest conceptual sense to mean the transposition of meaning from one language into another (Munday 2013). We therefore discuss sign language interpreting as a translation practice.
2. We acknowledge that amongst hearing fluent signers choosing to sign rather than use one's voice when an interpreter is present is also an identity construction/contextually dependent circumstance worthy further investigation, but it was not the focus of this study.

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